

Message Text

SECRET

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AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

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CINCPAC

S E C R E T WELLINGTON 0584

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR MPOL SN NZ UK AS

SUBJECT: US NAVY ACCESS TO STORAGE BASIN AND FUEL DEPOT IN SINGAPORE

REF A) STATE 045928 B) WELLINGTON 568; C) WELLINGTON 465

SUMMARY: HIGH GNZ OFFICIALS CONFIRM THAT IRRESPONSIBLE
BRUCE KOHN ARTICLE ON SINGAPORE (REFTEL B) WILL SERIOUSLY AGGRAVATE
PROBLEM OF NEW ZEALAND TAKING OVER MANAGEMENT OF
SINGAPORE FACILITIES. OFFICIALS STRESS, HOWEVER, THAT A GNZ
DECISION ON SINGAPORE FACILITIES MUST BE MADE BY WHOLE
GOVERNMENT, IS NOT LIKELY TO BE FORTHCOMING EARLIER THAN END
OF APRIL, AND THAT EFFORTS TO ACCELERATE NEW ZEALAND DECISION
COULD PROVE TO BE COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE. WE CONCUR WITH VIEWS
OF THESE OFFICIALS. END SUMMARY.

1. DURING SEPARATE MEETINGS MARCH 4 BETWEEN AMBASSADOR
AND DCM WITH SECRETARY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS FRANK CORNER AND
SECRETARY OF DEFENCE JOHN ROBERTSON, ALL ASPECTS OF SINGAPORE
FACILITIES QUESTION WERE DISCUSSED. CORNER AND ROBERTSON
WERE EXTREMELY UPSET BY BRUCE KOHN ARTICLE WHICH THEY FEARED
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WOULD PROVIDE LEFT-WING OF LABOUR PARTY AN EXCELLENT WEAPON

FOR AGITATING THE FACILITIES QUESTION AND BUILDING UP
OPPOSITION TO IT.

2. DURING MEETING WITH CORNER, WHICH WAS ALSO ATTENDED BY
DEPUTY SECRETARY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS MERVYN NORRISH, CORNER
STATED THAT MFA WAS CABLING ITS EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON TO
CORRECT ANY MISAPPREHENSIONS ABOUT SINGAPORE THAT KOHN
MIGHT HAVE PICKED UP FROM NEW ZEALAND SOURCES IN WASHINGTON.
BOTH CORNER AND NORRISH IMPLIED, HOWEVER, THAT THEY SUSPECTED
US OFFICIALS HAD PROVIDED KOHN WITH MATERIAL FOR HIS ARTICLE.
ROBERTSON ECHOED THE SAME SUSPICION. AMBASSADOR POINTED
OUT, APPARENTLY WITH SOME SUCCESS, INCONSISTENCY ON ONE
HAND OF USG TRYING TO PERSUADE NEW ZEALAND TO TAKE OVER
SINGAPORE FACILITIES AND, ON OTHER HAND, BEING SOURCE OF
ARTICLE LIKELY TO COMPLICATE NEW ZEALAND'S PROBLEMS IN
DOING SO.

3. CORNER AND ROBERTSON STRESSED THAT IN SPITE OF ADVERSE
EFFECT KOHN ARTICLE MIGHT HAVE ON GNZ DECISION RE SINGAPORE
FACILITIES, FINAL DECISION HAD NOT BEEN MADE. SITUATION
WAS STILL BASICALLY SAME AS IT HAD BEEN DURING INITIAL
EMBASSY DISCUSSION WITH ROBERTSON ON FEBRUARY 22 (REFTEL C).
THAT IS, ROBERTSON AND DEFENCE SECRETARY FRASER STILL
WOULD GO TO SINGAPORE TOWARDS END OF APRIL FOR DISCUSSIONS
WITH THEIR OWN PEOPLE AND SINGAPORE OFFICIALS RE NEW
ZEALAND'S ROLE IN FACILITIES QUESTION. THESE DISCUSSIONS
AND FACTUAL DATA SUPPLIED BY UNITED STATES, BRITAIN AND
AUSTRALIA WOULD FORM THE BASIS OF A DECISION TO BE MADE BY
WHOLE NEW ZEALAND GOVERNMENT. ROBERTSON EMPHASIZED THAT
REGARDLESS OF DECISION MADE BY NEW ZEALAND GOVERNMENT ON ACTUAL
OPERATION OF FACILITIES, HE WAS CONFIDENT ANY FINAL ARRANGEMENTS
WOULD ASSURE US AND NZ ADEQUATE AND ACCEPTABLE ACCESS TO FACILITIES,
AND THAT HIS GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS WOULD BE DIRECTED ACCORDINGLY.

4. UP TO TIME OF DISCUSSIONS WITH CORNER AND ROBERTSON,
NEW ZEALAND MEDIA HAD SURPRISINGLY NOT MADE ANY REFERENCE
TO KOHN ARTICLE. CORNER FELT THAT ANY DENIAL OR REFUTATION
OF ARTICLE WOULD ONLY DRAW FURTHER ADVERSE ATTENTION TO
SINGAPORE FACILITIES MATTER AND MIGHT LEND CREDENCE TO CHARGE
THAT US WAS PRESSURING NEW ZEALAND. SUBSEQUENTLY, GENERAL
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SIR RICHARD WEBB, CHIEF OF DEFENCE STAFF, TELEPHONED THE
AMBASSADOR WITH THE SAME THOUGHT AND SUGGESTED THAT VLETING
NEW ZEALAND DECISION-MAKING PROCESS PROCEED AT ITS OWN
PACE WOULD BEST SERVE OUR MUTUAL INTERESTS. WE STRONGLY
CONCUR WITH THIS VIEW AND REQUEST THAT ALL USG OFFICIALS
CAREFULLY AVOID ANY PUBLIC OR PRIVATE SUGGESTION THAT WE
MAY BE TRYING TO PRESSURE THE NEW ZEALANDERS TO MOVE
FASTER THAN THEIR GENERALLY LEISURELY PACE.

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